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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify significant sources of support for Canadian aboriginal students in a unique early childhood education program developed between the University of Victoria, British Columbia, and seven across Canada. The approach of this study provided a fresh perspective in that it gave students the opportunity to name unlimited sources of support without restricting the definition of support. Thus, it enabled a quantification of the importance of sources of support and the possibility of identifying support sources previously overlooked in the research literature. Commentary was invited from a broad spectrum of community members who had been involved in or affected by the program. The impacts of the training program across groups of participants were uncovered by an ecologically comprehensive research method that consisted of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analyses that included interviews and questionnaires. The focus of this report is on the qualitative analysis of transcribed accounts given by 103 First Nations graduates of the 2-year program delivered in 7 communities. The results of this investigation indicate that a supportive learning and teaching environment that yields high rates of retention and program completion can be created when postsecondary education is delivered in a community where students' natural support networks are accessible. Formal and informal types of support identified are: (1) financial support; (2) preparatory programs; (3) personal support services; (4) child care services; (5) curriculum design; (6) instructors; (7) instructional methods; (8) other students; (9) First Nations Elders; (10) practicum settings; (11) flexibility in program delivery; (12) community based program delivery; and (13) informal support from other community members and family members. (Contains 28 references.) (SLD)

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify significant sources of support for Aboriginal students in a unique Early Childhood Education program developed between the University of Victoria and seven aboriginal communities in Canada. The approach of this study provided a fresh perspective, in that it gave students the opportunity to name unlimited sources of support without restricting the definition of support. Thus, it enabled a quantification of the importance of sources of support and the possibility of identifying support sources previously overlooked within the research literature. The results of this investigation indicated that a supportive learning and teaching environment that yields high rates of retention and program completion can be created when postsecondary education is delivered in the community where students' natural support networks are accessible.

[1] Paper presented at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Division J (Postsecondary Education), Seattle, Washington.

Introduction

Aboriginal students who attend mainstream postsecondary education in Canada and the United States encounter culturally-based barriers to success, ranging from overt racism to latent forms of discrediting or disregarding the knowledge that resides in First Nations cultural traditions and contemporary practices. Low academic completion rates further signal the need for enhanced cultural relevance in education. Although the number of First Nations students enrolled in postsecondary programs reflects a dramatic change since the 1960s, when the participation rate was negligible (Archibald & Bowman, 1995), Aboriginal peoples are still manifestly underrepresented at Canadian universities. Between 1981 and 1991, the proportion of First Nations individuals with a university degree increased marginally from 2 to 2.6%; however, that was still 9% lower than the rate for the general Canadian population (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Similarly, Armstrong, Kennedy and Oberle (1990) found that in 1986 in Canada, only 1.3% of the First Nations population had completed a university degree, compared to 9.6% of the general population. Thus, non-First Nations individuals were 7.4 times more likely to successfully earn a degree. In spite of the efforts to improve First Nations' participation in post-secondary education, for the most part, Canadian universities do not yet provide an environment that attracts and retains First Nations students (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991).

Literature Review

To help understand the low participation and completion rate of First Nations individuals in postsecondary education, the role of support is increasingly being recognized as an important factor. The types of support provided to First Nations

students can be differentiated by the broad categories of formal and informal supports. Formal supports are those that are provided by the educational institution and, in some training arrangements, by the student's First Nation as a component of program delivery. Informal supports include supports for students that are not provided as a component of the delivery of the educational program such as support from family, friends, and community members.

Formal Support

Within the realm of formal support, financial support has been found to be a critical component in the success of First Nation students. For example, in a study of First Nations postsecondary education, financial support in graduate study was found to be a major factor in the success of First Nations students (Archibald & Bowman, 1995). In addition, a review of First Nations post-secondary education found that successful programs provided enhanced financial services (Wright, 1991). The need for adequate funding has also been raised by First Nations students themselves. Aiken and Falk (1993) found that approximately half of the First Nations university students in their survey identified adequate financial support as a significant factor in their ability to complete their education. In spite of these findings, insufficient financial support is a recognized problem in many First Nations post-secondary education programs (Wright, 1991).

Transition programs, which help to prepare students for the demands of a university or college classroom, have also been identified as an important source of support. Wright (1991) found that an important element of successful First Nations education programs was an emphasis on pre-college preparatory programs. Objectives of

some transition programs have included: determining the readiness of each student for the program; the development of basic academic skills necessary for success within a college program; and monitoring the success of each student in the transition program (Wright, 1995). The contents of transition programs have included: basic literacy; math preparation; computer word processing; science; study skills; life skills; and college orientation (Wright, 1995).

The research literature describes a need for First Nations-specific support programs on campuses (Archibald & Bowman, 1995). As part of this effort, many post-secondary education programs offer a variety of supports provided by First Nations people such as: First Nations counselors (Wright, 1995); mentors (Wright, 1995); advisors (Wright, 1995); Native study consultants (Archibald, 1986); and tutors (Archibald, 1986). In addition, research tends to indicate that support services are most effective when support personnel are First Nations people (Archibald & Bowman, 1995). Moreover, First Nations students were found to have a strong preference for First Nations counselors (Bennett & Big Foot-Sipes, 1991; Haviland, Horswill, O'Connell, & Dynneson, 1983) and were more likely to utilize their counseling services, no matter what the nature of the counseling issues (Haviland et al., 1983). In addition, some mainstream campuses offer accommodation along with personal support services. For example, a Native Adult Education Center was found to provide a "culturally identifiable space where Native adults are able to learn together in a supportive environment" (Selman & Dampier, 1991).

The relationship between students and instructors can be an important source of support for the First Nations student. Collier (1993) suggests that First Nations students

enjoy having a personal relationship with teachers and advises instructors to forge a personal relationship. Not only is this type of relationship valued by students but the lack of a positive relationship has been found to impact negatively on student success. For example, poor instruction and instructors' lack of knowledge about the students were found to be factors contributing to First Nations student attrition (Stuhr, 1987). In a study of First Nation students' achievement in a university setting, Wilson (1994) found the personal relationships between students and professors were a fundamental component to student success. The need for positive, personal relationships between students and instructors may be due, in part, to past negative experiences among First Nations students in educational settings. Martin (1993) posits that instructors with warm positive attitudes are thought to be particularly necessary for First Nations students who have often endured hostility, racism, denial of culture, and social alienation in previous educational experiences.

The role of Elders in the classroom is becoming increasingly recognized as an important support for students. Grant (1995) observes that Elders are willing to talk and instruct when approached by a learner. Elders are often described as being willing to wait to instruct the learner, rather than pushing a student into learning before they are receptive or able to accept instruction. Elders are also described as being a constant, non-judgmental, and generous source of information (Grant, 1995). Thus, Elders may provide support by sharing knowledge, and by reconfirming the inherent value of traditional knowledge and ways of knowing in an otherwise mainstream curriculum.

Another type of formal support that has been recognized as important to the success of First Nations students is the management of educational experiences of First

Nations people by First Nations people. There is growing recognition that for many First Nations students, there is neither intrinsic nor extrinsic motivation to learn the curriculum content in mainstream university courses (Wilson, 1994). The Assembly of First Nations in Canada has called for post-secondary curricula that are relevant to First Nations people, particularly in areas where there are culture specific considerations such as communication methods and teaching techniques (Charleston, 1988).

Support for the position that First Nations people need to be involved in the development and management of their education experiences has been found in a variety of programs. For example, in an evaluation of post-secondary education, Wright (1991) found that one of the characteristics of successful First Nations post-secondary education programs was collaboration with Native communities. In one partnership between a First Nation and a college in British Columbia, the First Nation participated in the course design to ensure relevance. In addition, the college accepted principles of self-determination by the First Nation, including the Nation's priority in maintaining jurisdiction over the educational decisions affecting its students (Wright, 1995). Overall, the joint venture resulted in increased student success rates in program completion.

Many partnerships between First Nations and educational institutions result in programs being offered within a First Nation community. Indeed, the Assembly of First Nations has recognized the need for more "satellite" and "extension" programs in First Nations communities (Charleston, 1988). Several advantages of community-based delivery of educational programs have been noted. Educational opportunities situated within First Nations communities enable students to access the naturally occurring supports within their communities. Friesen (1986) argues that locating programs within a

First Nations community reduces strain on the student's family thus promoting better student retention and completion rates. Community-based delivery can also impact the support provided by the community to the student and his/her family. For example, a community that has responsibility and initiative in the planning educational programs is more likely to support such an endeavor (Knowles, 1980).

Informal Supports

The research literature examining the role of informal support for student success is sparse. Across studies that have been reported, family support has emerged as a critical contributor to university success for First Nations students (Falk & Aitken, 1984; Wilson, 1983). Support from the family can occur in a number of areas, including: financial; emotional; cultural; and academic. For example, Sterling (1995) reported that maternal support, including stories and information, provide missing links to a cultural history lost due to residential schooling and other cultural dislocations. In another study of First Nations university students, parental support was mentioned by approximately half of the respondents as contributing significantly to staying in school (Aiken & Falk, 1983). The same study also found that one-third of students identified the support provided by friends as a positive factor influencing school retention.

First Nations Partnership Programs[2]

In response to the challenges faced by First Nations students in mainstream postsecondary education, seven First Nations band and tribal councils across western Canada entered into partnerships with the University of Victoria to provide postsecondary

[2] Information on the First Nation Partnership Program (FNPP) and details about the program evaluation are available at www.fnpp.org

training in Early Childhood Education. Since 1989, the First Nations Partnership Programs (FNPP) have designed and delivered a unique educational framework called the Generative Curriculum Model (Pence & McCallum, 1994). The program's guiding principles and its model for constructivist teaching and learning derive from a stance that is "all ways" respectful of the culturally-based knowledge that resides in First Nations communities (Pence & Ball, 1999). The educational process is deeply contextual, representing a radical departure from the customary "best practices" found in the Euro-western orientation of most mainstream universities (Ball & Pence, 2000; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). The twenty courses that comprise the full program make room for multiple viewpoints, including central roles of Elders and other community resource people, without impinging on academic credibility. Because attention is directed toward the reality of diversity, the FNPP approach provides a transposable model that can be adapted to the specific traditions, values and practices of other indigenous peoples seeking to train community members as child care educators and practitioners (Ball & Pence, 1999). In addition, the program is delivered entirely in the partnering First Nation community that initiates the partnership.

In each of the seven partnerships between the University of Victoria and the First Nations communities, the importance of support for student success was recognized. Each program attempted to address the support needs of its students in a variety of areas including: financial; learning; emotional; and cultural. These supports were provided in a number of ways, including for example: co-construction of curriculum; culturally grounded teaching and learning processes; and extensive community involvement. Although the importance of informal support via family and friends was recognized as

being essential to student success, the majority of the support services implemented as part of the program delivery focused on formal support. Informal support sources were also encouraged within components of formal support. For example, community-based delivery enabled students to remain in close contact with supportive family members. In order to document and investigate the effects of this innovative program in the seven partner communities a program evaluation was conducted.

Method

Over a two-year period from 1998-2000, data were gathered and analyzed to capture the experiences of representative groups of people involved in each of the training programs. A social participatory approach was used. As part of this process, each partner community contributed questions that would yield feedback of interest to their agenda. Collaborators were then recruited from each community to participate in aspects of data collection, analysis, written reporting, and conference presentations. Extensive commentary was invited from a broad spectrum of community members who had been involved in and/or affected by the program. The impacts of the training program across groups of program participants were uncovered by an ecologically comprehensive research method that consisted of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analyses strategies including: semi-structured individual and group interviews; structured questionnaires; focus groups of program administrators; participant observations in partnering communities and post-secondary institutions; community forums; two forums bringing together professionals involved in building capacity for Early Childhood Education in rural First Nations; and a review of records of seven partnership programs.

The focus of this report is on the qualitative analysis of transcribed accounts given by 103 First Nations graduates of the two year program delivered in seven communities.

Data analyses were conducted using a grounded theory method. The aim was to reduce the voluminous data into a manageable, communicable form that preserved the meaning of emergent categories and that yielded theoretical postulates and hypothesis expressed by the participants. The aim in reducing the textual data was to learn from participants' experiences about how the program worked, including both positive and negative processes and impacts, in their lives.

In regard to support, participants were asked open-ended questions about the ways in which support was received during the program. This method stands in contrast to past research which has often explored a limited number of support sources with support being defined by the researcher. The approach of this study provided a fresh perspective, in that it gave students the opportunity to name unlimited sources of support without restricting the definition of support. Thus, it enabled sources of support to be quantified and ranked in importance along with the possibility of identifying support sources previously overlooked within the research literature. The method also allowed for the sharing of students' experiences using their own voices and words. One drawback from this research design, however, is that the reported levels of support may actually be a conservative tally. This is due to the fact that a student may have felt a source of support but failed to spontaneously identify it as such.

Results

The experience of the FNPP is that a bicultural partnership, using a generative curriculum model for community-based education, can create a supportive learning and

teaching environment that translates into measurable academic success as well as individual and community transformations. Statistical indicators of the success of the FNPP attest to the positive outcomes experienced in the areas of program retention and completion. For example, 77.3% of students completed two years of full-time, university-accredited study, and an additional 9.1% completed one year of accredited course work. Across communities, between 70% and 100% of students achieved Early Childhood Education certification issued by a provincial licensing board. Success of these programs can also be measured at the community level. Specifically, 95% of program graduates remained in their own communities and 65% of graduates introduced new programs or were hired by existing service providers. In order to understand the components that led to this level of success within the program, an analysis of the formal and informal types of support follows.

Financial Support

Prior to program delivery, funding was secured by the partnering First Nations for: prior learning assessments of prospective students; academic and psychosocial preparatory courses; and for program delivery including practicum placements, student support services and post-program follow-up. In addition, each of the seven First Nations partners were able to offer their students varying levels of financial support. Many students had the cost of their tuition and books covered by community organizations. Others were given allowances to cover living expenses such as rent, food, and school supplies.

The provision of financial resources was clearly identified as an important source of support by students. Analysis of responses to a questionnaire completed by students

showed that, on average, 50% of the funding received was from the students' own band or tribal association (compared to 42% governmental, 4% family, 2% self, and 2% other). Many students felt that their education would not have been possible without the economic support provided by the community organizations.

Preparatory programs

The FNPP in all seven communities included a preparatory program to help students develop the necessary skills needed for success in an educational environment. Typical components of preparatory programs included: English upgrading courses; life skills (including time management and communication); study skills; and computer skills. In addition, all of the partner communities offered prospective students the opportunity to learn more about the field of Early Childhood Education before committing to enrolling in the program. In some partner communities, students were afforded opportunities to attend early childhood conferences and to visit day care centers before the program commenced. This exposure gave prospective students the chance to evaluate their interest in working in the field in order to increase the probability of student retention once the students were immersed in full-time studies in Early Childhood Education.

Personal support services

In all of the partner communities, a designated support person was in place for the students. The support person was available at no cost to students to address any concerns both within and beyond the program. One community hired a certified therapist specifically for the students. The other six communities had counselors already in their communities whom students could access. For example, in Meadow Lake's initial pilot

course, one of the First Nations instructors was also a counselor to the students. In another community, a non-First Nations drug and alcohol counselor was employed to support the entire community including the students. In addition, two partner communities identified Elders to serve as mentors for each student to assist them practically, emotionally, and culturally.

Child care services

Many of the students involved in the FNPP were parents themselves. As such, these students had to balance the demands of a university program with the needs of their families. All of the partnership programs attempted to meet the childcare needs of their participants as a component of program delivery. For example, in the Meadow Lake partnership, the Tribal Council arranged for a child-minding program in the same facility as the program so that students with children could attend classes while still being in close proximity to their children. In addition, in three communities, students were permitted to have their children attend class with them on an as-needed basis.

Curriculum design

The curricula in the FNPP were developed with an advisory board of child care experts from across North America. The knowledge from mainstream North American culture was blended with traditional knowledge of First Nations people. Each of the 20 courses had to meet the university academic requirements while being community-based. The courses had to cover a prescribed body of child care material, while drawing on the students' own cultural backgrounds. For example, the curriculum included studying the theoretical approaches to play developed by European-based models along with the experience of First Nations people. Written into each course were specific activities

encouraging students to reflect on their own cultural backgrounds and to research child care traditions in their own communities. While the integrity of the course content was maintained, instructors were encouraged to create and implement activities which helped students experience their own learning and generate First Nations content. By co-constructing a curriculum that is relevant to the lives and learning needs of First Nations students, the students applied what they learned, on a daily basis, with their own people, in their own communities (Pence & McCallum, 1994). Overall, in order to foster a supportive learning environment for students, the curricula was co-constructed to be meaningful to the students.

Instructors

It was recognized within the partnerships that the ideal situation would be for the instructors to be community members; however, this was not possible in all seven communities. In four of the partnerships, Meadow Lake, N'zen'man, Mount Currie and Tl'azt'en Nations, at least one of the course instructors was a member of a First Nation. Mount Currie First Nation had instructors from their own community exclusively. More often, non-community members were placed in program instructor roles and had to orient themselves both to the program and to the community upon arrival. An important part of this orientation for the instructors included learning and becoming comfortable with differences between non-Native and Native styles of communicating and interacting. All instructors reflected an openness to the value of First Nations practices and wisdom.

Given the experiential nature of the program, where students were asked to share personal memories and experiences, a dynamic evolved whereby students sometimes needed emotional support within the classroom. Thus, in addition to hiring instructors

that could best meet the educational needs of the students, instructors had to be able to emotionally support their students. Often instructors were able to meet these support needs through encouragement, respect, and supportive listening. In some cases, students required additional assistance. Thus, instructors needed to have knowledge about community support services in order to direct students to other helpers within the community (Halldorson, 1994).

In addition to instructors being identified as an importance source of support within the philosophy of the FNPP, the students themselves consistently named the instructors as a source of support. Seventy-four percent of students reported that their instructors were a source of support during interviews placing instructors as the second most frequently cited source of support overall and the most frequently mentioned source of formal support. The students repeatedly described their instructors as the primary source of academic support.

In addition to academic support, the students also named instructors as important providers of personal and emotional assistance. A student in the partnership program with the Mount Currie First Nation commented, "*... having [the instructor] there for student support helped me a lot. I was able to go to her with my problems and talk through it and ... [it] brought us through different situations or different healing processes. There [were] times where it did get emotional for people and it just came down to the point where students would stop attending and the instructors would have to go out right into the homes and check up on them.*" The level of personal and emotional support provided by instructors was so strong that some students felt that their relationships with the instructors developed into a friendship. For example, a Mount

Currie student mentioned, *"I was going through a lot of hard times but the teachers, they catch you up on it, and they were aware of the situation like personal problems. So I find that that's nice. It's like they're your friend as well as they are your teacher."*

Instructional methods

The partnerships employed instructional strategies that were highly supportive of needs of First Nations students. A participatory learning approach was used which assumes that students bring knowledge and experience with them, and thus acknowledges them as teachers as well as students (Halldorson, 1994). The instructors acted as facilitators helping students to analyze their experiences and to integrate new information. Participatory learning included learning by doing using such techniques as journal-writing, portfolio creations, and practicum experiences. Students clearly appreciated the instructional methods used by instructors. For example, a N'zen'man student reported, *"They showed you visually, hands-on, they gave you ideas. There wasn't a right or wrong way. It was always the right way, just different learning. So that was really nice, that you weren't wrong, because that's really scary. If I'm told I'm wrong, it gives me the initiative to give up."*

Co-operative learning was similarly stressed in the classroom in order to encourage students to provide maximum levels of mutual support. Co-operative learning emphasized students learning together rather than independently. The instructors' role involved planning the construction of co-operative groups, explaining the task and goals of the activities, monitoring the effectiveness of the learning groups and intervening when needed, evaluating individual student achievement and helping groups evaluate

achievement. Specific techniques used to encourage co-operative learning included brainstorming, role-playing, team projects, and group discussions.

Other students

The emphasis on students learning co-operatively helped to provide an atmosphere that encouraged mutual support among the students. The support of fellow students was frequently reported to be greatly valued by students. Other students in the program were mentioned as a source of support by 54.5% of students ranking it as the third most frequently cited support. Students were seen as an important source of both emotional and practical support especially during times of difficulty. For example, an Onion Lake student stated, *"I'm one of the Mother Gooses. We had a lot of support for one another. All of us supported each other. Whenever we tried to give up, we kicked each other. We kept telling each other, 'you can't do this. It's not long. It's the last year.' That's how things were. There were too many things going on in our lives that we tried to give up, but we didn't. We just kept each other going."*

The students reported that an enabling condition for the strong support that they received from their fellow students developed because of the intimate class size and structure. For example, a Mount Currie student reported that, *"There's fifteen of us in the class and we all knew each other and I felt if you were anywhere else out in the campus or whatever you'd be, there'd be a hundred. There'd be numbers and you probably wouldn't be able to have that same relationship, friendship with all your classmates."* In addition, the support of other students helped to develop relationships that extended beyond the program. Specifically, a Meadow Lake student commented, *"Talking to each*

other, sharing, helping each other if we weren't sure about something. I made a friend in the class ... we're still friends today".

Elders

The Elders played an important support role in each of the seven partnerships. Since First Nations Elders are the main source of knowledge of traditional theories and methods of working with children, their participation was essential to the inclusion of desired cultural components within the curriculum. Community Elders participated in the classroom as co-instructors sharing their knowledge and wisdom to support students learning needs. Instructors elicited from the Elders their perspectives of their own First Nations communities on the topics being studied. The instructors stayed alert for opportunities to integrate culturally appropriate teachings gleaned from the Elder teaching sessions throughout the programs while students were encouraged to integrate the knowledge from the Elders into all discussions and activities.

Students indicated that a variety of support was provided by the Elders both as a formal part of their program involvement and less formally through ongoing individual contact. Overall, 10.4% of students reported during student interviews that Elders were a source of support. The inclusion of Elders in the classroom supported the students' learning of traditional Native childrearing practices. In addition, many students developed new ties and relationships to Elders in their communities. The growing alliances provided emotional support and practical guidance to students. A student in the partnership program with N'zen'man Child and Family Services commented, *"I think having the Elders there is what got me through it. They were my support system. Any advice an Elder gives you is the honest truth. There's total respect between you and that*

Elder." In addition, Elders provided support by encouraging students to view their education as beneficial to themselves and to their communities. A Tl'azt'en student reported, *"The Elders are really good. Every time they see me they [say], 'Are you still going to school?' and 'Oh, you ladies are doing so good, you can make a difference in the community.' They really encourage us and tell us to keep on going until we are done."*

Practicum settings

The critical role played by practicum supervisors in supporting the training needs of students was recognized in each partnership. The selection of practicum sites was given careful consideration. Instructors carefully interviewed staff at practicum settings and sites that were found to be open and accepting of First Nations students were selected to be affiliated with the programs. Ensuring a supportive environment for students during practicum placements was achieved by the initiation of communication and the development of a good working relationship between program administrators and instructors prior to program commencement. In one community, an instructor prepared an introduction to the program which was distributed to each practicum site helping to gain the cooperation and support of the setting. Practicum supervisors were informed of the details of the program and the expectations for each practicum. The practicum staff and students were informed of the goals of the program and the evaluation criteria so the students could best be supported and guided. Careful attention was given to adequately prepare students for practicum placements as the experience had the potential to be very foreign for First Nations students from remote communities.

In terms of recognition as a source of support, 3.9% of students identified the staff at the practicum settings as a source of support. Students reported that practica staff provided instrumental assistance such as lending resource materials to assist with assignments. This gave students access to a variety educational supplies that may have been otherwise unavailable.

Flexibility in program delivery

In each of the partnerships between the University of Victoria and the First Nations community, flexibility in program delivery was stressed in order to best support the needs of the students. The communities chose to offer the programs either on a part-time or full-time basis depending on specific needs of the communities and students. Flexibility was also encouraged in the daily working of the classroom. Care was taken to avoid maintaining the rigidity of a typical college calendar of terms, such as start and finish dates and when grades have to be submitted. Flexibility in these areas allowed for greater adherence to the mores, social life, and cultural rhythms within the First Nations culture.

Community-based program delivery

A stated goal of the program was to deliver First Nations community-based Child and Youth Care programs that allowed students to maintain as close contact as possible to their families and home communities. It was recognized that, in the past, many community-based First Nations students have found the process of relocating to an urban campus to be costly, stressful, and potentially isolating. Relocation was acknowledged as particularly difficult for mature students, whose previous school experience may not have been positive, and who may face challenges of parenting while pursuing post-secondary

studies. Thus, the actual training of the students took place locally, so students would not have to leave their communities to move far away for months or years at a time. Students were allowed to remain rooted in or near their communities within close proximity to their natural sources of support.

Prior to the onset of any program delivery, garnering the support of the community was viewed as crucial. In order to achieve this goal, the community was informed of the proposed training programs through community meetings and dinners and door-to-door campaigning. Attempts were also made in many communities to secure the participation of other community training services and community social services. In the Cowichan partnership, an Advisory Committee and a Curriculum Committee formed consisting largely of Cowichan Tribe members. These bodies reviewed course material on a weekly basis. As part of this process committee members screened, edited, and reshaped the material to improve the cultural fit. Similarly, in Mount Currie, a Steering Committee was formed in order to implement the program. Community-based resource people were invited into the classroom to share their expertise on a variety of topics related to child and youth care. In the partnership with the Treaty 8 Tribal Association, the support of all of the preschools, daycares, family daycares, and play schools both on and off reserve were gained. All of the centers shared their resources with the program. For example, classes were held in their facilities so students were exposed to different centers, equipment, and activities.

The ability to access sources of support within their communities and families was consistently and repeatedly acknowledged by students. In regard to larger community organizations, First Nation bands and Tribal Associations were mentioned as

being sources of support by 39% of students. A Cowichan student noted, *"My Mom's Band - they recognized that I was family. They couldn't support me financially, but they supported me in doing what I was doing and that was really important to me. I went to the Band a couple of times and talked to Elders there."*

In addition to formal sources of community support, informal support sources were identified by students as being fundamental to their success. Individual community members were described as being an important source of support. During interviews, 27.3% of students reported that they had experienced support from a least one community member beyond their family. Many community members showed their support by expressing interest in both the program and individual students' progress in it. A Cowichan student reported, *"When people are interested in what you're doing you feel supported. My doctor and my dentist asked me how I was doing and was I nearly finished. My mechanic kept my car on the road and didn't charge me. I felt supported."* Students linked the support they received from their communities as helping them to both develop and achieve their goals. Another Cowichan student said, *"I got support from community members. I think it helped me a lot. It really brought up my self-esteem, my concept of self. It gave me a goal of knowing that these people, I guess, in a way, look up to me. So, I needed to finish and succeed in this Child and Youth Care program for the betterment of myself and my community."*

Finally, the support provided by family members emerged as a key component of student success. Family was cited as a source of support by 80.5% of students making it the source of support mentioned by the largest percentage of students. The support from students' families included emotional, academic, and instrumental support. Families

often encouraged students to believe in their own ability to be successful in the program and beyond. Numerous family members provided emotional support by encouraging students to look to the future for the gains and opportunities that would result from their involvement in the program rather than focusing on their current difficulties. The emotional support provided by family members also included allowing students to talk about their struggles and challenges. For example, a Cowichan student reported, *"I didn't feel alone. I felt like there was someone standing there with me. Whenever there was a problem, I could go to my family and talk to them about things that had happened in the program and we'd talk it over."*

In some cases, families provided a role model of educational success in addition to academic assistance. A Mount Currie student noted, "*Watching [my three sisters] go to school, doing what they did, is giving me a lot of support. And they are always there for me, no matter what it is I need. They help me out. Some of the things I can discuss with them now, and I know that they know something about it already."* Additionally, many students faced considerable challenges balancing their multiples roles such as student, spouse, and parent. Families were seen to be an instrumental part of the support needed to balance these demanding and time consuming undertakings. Support in these areas included assistance with child care and household duties.

Conclusion

The success of the First Nations Partnership Programs has clearly been shown across several dimensions. The students, in addition to completing programs at a very high rate, reported growth in a number of areas as part of their involvement in the program. Improved self-esteem, enhanced cultural identity, psychological growth and

improved parenting effectiveness were all identified positive outcomes from program involvement. The communities in which these partnership programs took place also felt positive ripple effects from the FNPP. Community empowerment, cultural healing, enhanced services for children and youth, and revitalized traditional intergenerational relationships were all identified as positive outgrowths from the programs. Thus, the provision of support to students helped to create benefits beyond successful academic completion rates.

In addition, many lessons were learned from the implementation of these programs. The results indicate that a supportive learning and teaching environment is created through a community-involving process, not a product, which encompasses multiple areas of program design and delivery. The instructors were found to play a role that expanded well beyond that of provider of information to include significant personal and academic support to the students. The partnership communities provided power and resources to the students and the partnerships. These programs expanded beyond the provision of culturally sensitive information drawing on the strength and skills of a community of learners, of which students were a part of, as opposed to an add-on model.

The emphasis on the provision of formal and informal support as a key component in the First Nations Partnership Programs helped both students and communities achieve multiple goals in a variety of areas. The commentary of students, the experience of instructors, the knowledge of community members, and the observations of the institutions within these partnerships, along with a growing literature by researchers, all provide evidence of the importance of support in order to increase the success of First Nations students in post-secondary education.

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